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1. juvenile literature - English, American

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Aunt



AUNT
POLLY SHEDD'S
BRIGADE



AND
OTHER
STORIES

+

Illustrated



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TELL ME MY LITTLE MAN WHERE YOU SAW THE BRITISH UNIFORM.

AUNT POLLY SHEDD'S BRIGADE.

SOMETHING about the Battle of Hampden?" Grandma took off her spectacles and wiped them reflectively. "It seems to me already I have told you everything worth telling; but there!" in a sudden burst of recollection, "did I ever tell you about Aunt Polly Shedd's Brigade? That was quite an affair to those of us that belonged to it!"

"Oh, no! do tell us about it!" called out the three childish voices in chorus; and grandma only waited to knit by the seam needle.

"I've told you all about it so many times that I don't need to describe again that dreadful morning when the British man-of-war came up the river and, dropping her anchor just opposite our little village of Hampden, sent troops ashore to take

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possession of the place in the King's name. So what I am going to tell you now is how, and where, we youngsters spent the three days that the British occupied our houses. I was about twelve years old at the time. I remember that it was just as we were getting up from the breakfast-table that one of our neighbors, Sol Grant, old General Grant's youngest son, rushed in without knocking, his face as white as a sheet, and his cap on hind-side before, and called out hurriedly :

“ ‘ Mr. Swett, if you love your family, for God's sake find a place of safety for 'em ! The British are coming ashore — three boat-loads of 'em, armed to the teeth — and they won't spare man, woman nor child. ’

“ Mother's face grew very pale, but she stepped quietly around, with her baby on her arm, close to where father was standing, and laid one hand on his arm, while she said, in a firm, clear voice :

“ ‘ *My* place is with you, Benjamin, but we must think of some place of safety for the children. Where can they go ? ’

“ Sol was just rushing out of the door as uncere-

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moniously as he had rushed in, but he stopped when he heard her ask that, long enough to say :

“‘I forgot to tell you that Aunt Polly Shedd will take all the children put in her charge out to Old Gubtil’s ; that’s so out of the way they won’t be disturbed, ’specially as the old man’s a tory himself.’

“Mother kissed us all round, with a smile on her face that couldn’t quite hide the tears with which her dear eyes were filled, and as she hastily bundled us in whatever garment came to hand, she bade us be good children, and make aunt Polly and the Gubtils as little trouble as possible. Then we followed father out-of-doors and into the school-house yard where a score or more of children were already gathered — still as mice for intense terror. Aunt Polly, in her big green calash, and a pillow-case of valuables under one arm, was bustling to and fro, speaking an encouraging or admonitory word, as the case might be, and wearing upon her pinched, freckled little face such a reassuring smile that I soon felt my own courage rise and, dashing back the tears that had filled my eyes a moment

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before, I busied myself in pinning little Sally's blanket more closely about her neck and setting the faded sunbonnet upon the tangled curls that had not yet had their customary morning's dressing.

“ ‘Come, children,’ called out aunt Polly cheerily, ‘you’re all here now, and we’ll start right off. I’ll go ahead, an’ all you little ones had best keep close to me ; the bigger ones can come along behind.’

“Obedient to her order we started, following her steps across the road by the beeches, and up by the grocery store where a crowd of excited men were congregated, talking loudly with wild gesticulations, while farther down, toward the shore, we could catch glimpses, through the thick morning fog, of the blue uniforms of our militia company that had been summoned in hot haste to defend the town. As we filed past, I remember I heard one of the men on the grocery steps speak :

“ ‘I tell you they won’t leave one stone on another if they get possession of the town, and they’ll impress all the able-bodied men and all the big boys into the King’s service besides.’

AUNT POLLY SHEDD'S BRIGADE.

"A cold shiver ran over me and I caught so hard at little Sally's hand that the child cried out with pain, and aunt Polly said anxiously :

" 'Hurry up, dears ! 'tain't much more'n a mile out to Gubtil's, and you'll have a good nice chance to rest after we get there.'

"Just then the martial music of a fife and drum announced the landing of the enemy's troops, and I tell you it quickened the lagging footsteps of even the youngest child into a run, and we just flew, helter-skelter, over the rough, little-used road that led to the Gubtil farm. Aunt Polly's gentle tones were unheeded. All she could do was to carry the weakest in her arms over all the worst places, with a word of cheer, now and then, to some child who was not too much frightened to heed it.

"What a haven of safety the low, unpainted old farmhouse looked to us, as we rushed, pell-mell, into the dooryard, never noticing, in our own relief, the ungracious scowl with which the master and mistress of the house regarded our advent.

"Aunt Polly soon explained matters, taking

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care to assure the inhospitable pair that our parents would amply recompense them for the trouble and expense we must, of course, be to them.

"The farmer held a whispered consultation with his wife, and I remember well his harsh, loud tones as he came back to aunt Polly :

" 'They'll *have* to stay, I s'pose ; there don't seem no help for it now. There's pertaters in the cellar, an' they can roast an' eat what they want. I'll give 'em salt an' what milk an' brown bread they want, an' that's what they'll have to live on for the present. As for housin' 'em, the boys can sleep on the hay in the barn, an' the girls can camp down on rugs an' comforters on the kitchen floor. That's the best I can do, an' if they ain't satisfied they can go further.'

"I remember just how he looked down at the troubled, childish faces upturned to his own, as if half hoping we might conclude to wander yet farther away from our imperilled homes ; but aunt Polly hastened to answer :

" 'Oh, we'll get along nicely with milk for the little ones, and potatoes and salt for the big boys

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and girls, and we won't trouble you any more nor any longer than we can help, Mr. Gubtil.'

"She stood upon the door-stone beside him as she spoke, a little, bent, slightly deformed figure, with a face shrivelled and faded like a winter-russet apple in spring-time, and a dress patched and darned till one scarcely could tell what the original was like, in a striking contrast to the tall, broad-shouldered, hale old man, whose iron frame had defied the storms of more than seventy winters; but I remember how he seemed to me a mere pigmy by the side of the generous, large-hearted woman whose tones and gestures had a protective-ness, a strength born of love and pity, that reassured us trembling little fugitives in spite of our ungracious reception. We felt that aunt Polly would take care of us, let what would come.

"The hours dragged slowly away. Aunt Polly told us that the distant firing meant that our men had not retreated without an effort to defend the village. When this firing ceased, we began to watch and hope that some message would come from our fathers and mothers. But none came.

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We wondered among our little selves if they all had been put to death by the British, and even the oldest among us shed some dreary tears.

"Dan Parsons, who was the biggest boy among us and of an adventurous turn, went in the gathering twilight gloom down as near the village as he dared. He came shivering back to us with such tales of vague horror that our very hearts stopped beating while we listened.

" 'I crep' along under the shadder of the alders and blackberry bushes,' he began, ' 'til I got closter De'con Mileses house. 'Twas as still as death 'round there, but jest as I turned the corner by the barn I see somethin' gray a-flappin' and a-flutterin' jest inside the barn door. I stopped, kind o' wonderin' what it could be, when all at once I thought I should 'a' dropped, for it came over me like a flash that it might be '—

" 'What, what, Dan?' cried a score of frightened voices; and Dan replied solemnly:

" ' *The old deacon's skulp!* ' "

" 'Oh dear! oh dear!' sobbed the terrified chorus.

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"Aunt Polly could do nothing with us ; and little Dolly Miles, the deacon's granddaughter, burst into a series of wild lamentations that called Farmer Gubtil to the door to know the cause of the commotion.

" 'What's all this hullabaloo about ?' he asked crossly ; and when he had heard the story he seized Dan and shook him till his teeth chattered.

" 'What do you mean by tellin' such stuff an' scarin' these young ones ter death ?' he demanded.

" Dan wriggled himself from his grasp and looked sulkily defiant :

" 'I didn't say '*'twas* that,' he muttered. 'I said it *might* be, an' p'r'aps '*'twas* ; or it *might* 'a' been the deacon's old mare switchin' 'er tail ter keep off the flies. I'm sure *I* don't know which '*'twas*. But girls are always a-squealin' at nothin'.'

" And with this parting fling at us tearful ones, Dan turned in the direction of the barn ; but I was too anxious to hear from father and mother to let 'im go without a word more. 'Dan,' I whispered with my hand on his arm, 'did you see or hear anything of *our* folks ?'

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“ ‘No!’ was the rather grumpy reply; ‘after what I saw at the deacon’s I didn’t want ter ventur’ furdur, but from there I could see ‘em lightin’ fires in the village, an’ I don’t doubt by this time that most o’ the houses is in flames.’ ”

“With this comforting assurance Dan went off to his bed upon the haymow, and I crept back into the house and laid my tired head down upon aunt Polly’s motherly lap, where, between my sobs, I managed to tell what Dan had told me.

“Aunt Polly laid a caressing hand upon my hair: “La, child,” said she soothingly, ‘don’t you worry yourself a bit over Dan Parson’s stories. That boy was *born* to tell stories. The Britishers are bad enough, but they ain’t heathen savages, an’ if the town has surrendered, as I calc’late it has, the settlers will be treated like prisoners o’ war. There won’t be no sculpin’ nor burnin’ o’ houses — no, dear. And now,’ giving me a little reassuring pat, ‘you’re all tired out, an’ ought ter be asleep. I’ll make you up a bed on this rug with a cushion under your head, an’ my big plaid



"THERE WON'T BE NO SCULPIN' OR BURNIN', DEAR."

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shawl over you, an' you'll sleep jest as sound as if you was ter home in your own trundle-bed.'

"Little Sally shared my rug and shawl, and aunt Polly, gently refusing the ungracious civility of the old couple, who had offered her the use of their spare bedroom, after seeing every little, tired form made as comfortable as possible with quilts and blankets from the farmwife's stores, laid herself down upon the floor beside us, and after commending herself and us to the God she loved and trusted, raised her head and spoke to us once more in her sweet, hopeful, quavering old tones :

"'Good night, dears ! Go to sleep and don't be a bit afraid. I shouldn't wonder if your folks come for you in the mornin'.'

"What comfort there was in her words ! And even the very little ones, who had never been away from their mothers a night before in their lives, stopped their low sobbing and nestled down to sleep, sure that God and aunt Polly would let no harm come to them.

"The next day passed slowly and anxiously for us all. From a stray traveller aunt Polly learned

AUNT POLLY SHEDD'S BRIGADE.

that the village was still in the hands of the British and— what was no little comfort to us —



MR. GUBTIL AND HIS ACCOUNT-BOOK.

that no violence had been done to the place or its inhabitants. Some of the older boys were for venturing to return, but aunt Polly held them back

AUNT POLLY SHEDD'S BRIGADE.

with her prudent arguments. If their parents had consiuered it safe for them to come home they would have sent for them. The British, she said, had been known to impress boys, as well as men, into service, and the wisest way was to keep out of their sight.

"The gentle, motherly advice prevailed, and even Dan Parsons contented himself with climbing the tallest trees in the vicinity, from which he could see the chimneys of several of the nearest houses. From these pinnacles he would call out to us at intervals :

"'The smoke comin' out o' Deacon Mileses chimly has a queer look, somethin' like burnin' feathers ! I shouldn't wonder a mite if them Britishers was burnin' up his furnitoor ! Sam Kelly's folks hain't had a spark o' fire in their fireplace to-day. Poor critters ! Mebbe there ain't nobody left ter want one.'

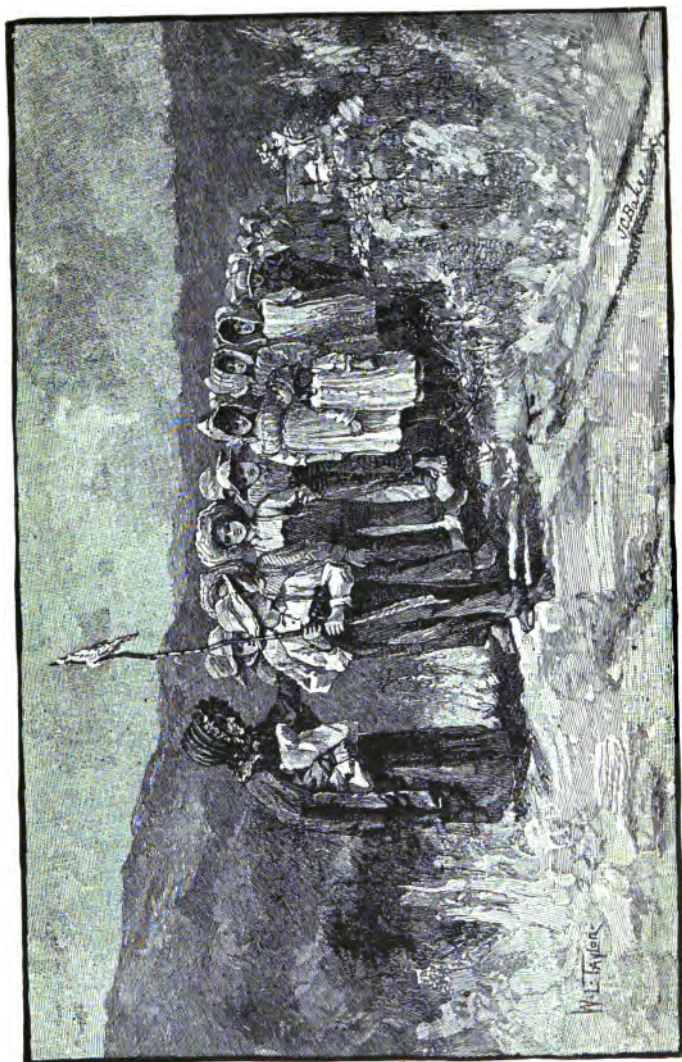
"With these dismal surmises, Dan managed to keep our forlorn little flock as uncomfortable as even he could wish ; and as the second night drew on, I suppose the homesickness of the smaller ones

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must have been pitiful to see. Aunt Polly patted and cuddled the forlorn little things to the best of her ability, but it was past midnight before the last weary, sobbing baby was fairly asleep, while all night long one or another would start up terrified from some frightful dream, to be soothed into quiet by the patient motherly tenderness of their wakeful protector.

“Next morning the brow of the farmer wore an ominous frown, and his wife, as she distributed to each the scant measure of brown bread and milk remarked, grudgingly, that she should think 'twas 'bout time that her house was cleared of a crowd o' hungry, squallin' young ones; and then Mr. Gubtil took out his account-book and wrote down the name of each child, with an estimate of the amount of bread, milk and potatoes consumed by each. He did this with the audible remark that 'if folks thought he was a-feedin' an' a-housin' their young ones for nothin' they'd find themselves mightily mistaken.'

“The third morning dragged slowly away. Dinner was over and still no message for us forlorn



AUNT POLLY GIVES BENJIE A FLAG OF TRUCE.

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AUNT POLLY SHEDD'S BRIGADE.

little ones. At last aunt Polly slowly arose from her seat upon the doorstep, with the light of a strong, courageous resolve on her little face.

“‘Children!’ she called loudly, and after we had gathered at her call, she spoke to us with an encouraging smile :

“‘I’ve made up my mind that ’twon’t be best for us to stay here another night. We’re in the way, and the little ones would be better off at home with their mothers. We know that the fightin’ is all over, and I don’t believe that the English soldiers’ll be bad enough to hurt a lot o’ little helpless children, ’specially if they’re under a flag o’ truce.’

“Here she drew a handkerchief from her pocket. This she fastened carefully to a stick. Then putting it into the hands of my brother Ben, a well-grown lad of twelve, she went on with her directions :

“‘We’ll form in procession, just as we came, and you, Benjie, may march at the head with this white flag a-wavin’ to let them know that we come in peace. I’ll follow next with the biggest boys, an’

AUNT POLLY SHEDD'S BRIGADE.

the girls, with the little ones, must keep behind where it's safest.'

"Perhaps it was the contagion of aunt Polly's cheerful courage, but more likely it was the blessed hope of seeing home and father and mother again, that made the little folks so prompt to obey her directions. We formed ourselves in line in less time than it takes to tell about it; we elder girls took charge of the wee ones who were so rejoiced to leave the inhospitable roof of the Gubtils' that they forgot all their fears of the terrible English, and trotted along as blithely over the deserted road as if not a fear had ever terrified their childish hearts, and as if English soldiers were still simply those far-off monsters that had served as bugbears to frighten them now and then into obedience to maternal authority.

"The Gubtils watched us off without a word of encouragement or friendliness. Aunt Polly walked close behind the flag-bearer with a firm step, but I could see that she was very pale, and when we came to descend the little hill that led into the village, and when just at its foot, where then stood the

AUNT POLLY SHEDD'S BRIGADE.

grocery of old Penn Parker, we caught a glimpse of the scarlet uniforms of several soldiers loafing about — then even we children could see that her steps faltered ; and I remember I thought she was fearful of some violence.

“ But the next moment she was walking steadily along again as if no thought of danger or retreat had ever entered her mind ; and as we came opposite the grocery and a tall man in an officer's uniform strolled out toward us with a curious, questioning look upon his handsome face, she gave the word of command to her little brigade in a voice as clear as a bell :

“ ‘ Halt, children ! ’

“ We all stood still as mice, eying the stranger with looks in which fear and admiration were probably curiously blended, while aunt Polly, taking the white flag from her color-bearer, advanced with a firm front to meet the foe who now, reinforced by several men, stood beside the way, evidently wondering what this queer parade was about.

“ ‘ Sir ! ’ and aunt Polly's voice trembled perceptibly but she waved the white flag manfully

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under his very nose, 'sir, I demand a safe passage for these innocent children to their different homes.'

"The officer stared, and his mouth twitched mischievously as if he had hard work to keep from laughing outright. But he was a gentleman; and when he spoke, he spoke like one.

" 'My good woman,' he said kindly, 'these children are nothing to me. If you wish permission for them to go to their own homes you are welcome to it, though in what way the matter concerns me I must confess I am at a loss to imagine.

"Then, and not till then, aunt Polly broke down and sobbed aloud :

" 'Run, children!' she cried as soon as she could speak; 'go home just as fast as you can scud; an' tell your folks,' she added with a gust of gratitude, 'that there's worse folks in the world than an Englishman.'

"You may be sure that we waited for no further urging; and as we flew, rather than ran, in the direction of our different homes, I heard the irrepressible burst of laughter with which the officer

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and his men received the grateful spinster's compliment which, to the day of her death, she loved to repeat whenever she told the thrilling story of her adventure with the English officer, 'when Hampden was took by the British in 1814;' always concluding with this candid admission:

" 'An' really, now, if he'd 'a' been anybody but an Englishman, an' an inimy, I should 'a' said that I never sot eyes on a better-built, more mannerly man, in all my born days.' "

THE INVISIBLE PAINTER.

ONE fine spring morning, a great many years ago, five or six young men were assembled in a large painting-room in one of the great Spanish cities, while a grave, dark-haired, rather sad-looking man, in a rich dress of purple velvet, was going from picture to picture, and saying a few words upon each, to which his pupils listened very respectfully. — And well they might; for this man was himself one of the greatest painters living, and his name was Esteban (Stephen) Murillo.

But it was plain that the pupils had not been working as well as usual that day; for Murillo had a great deal of fault-finding to do. One student had painted an arm wrong; another had spoiled the effect of his sunset; a third had made a bad fault in the shading of his sky; and so on, and so

THE INVISIBLE PAINTER.

on, till at last the master lost patience altogether, and cried angrily:

“Really, gentlemen, this is too bad! You don’t seem to remember anything that I tell you. If you can’t do better than this, that poor little monkey of a Sebastian, yonder, has a good chance of becoming a painter as any of you!”

The “poor little monkey” was a Moorish lad of fourteen, one of Murillo’s servants, who had to sweep out the painting-room, grind the students’ colors for them, and do other jobs about the house. His face flushed as he heard his master speak so contemptuously of him; but he said nothing.

When the pupils came in the next morning, one or two of them noticed that their pictures were not where they had left them; and Manuel Suarez, a little black-eyed fellow with a pretty hot temper of his own, found his brushes all smeared with paint, and flew into a passion at once:

“The Zombi* must have been at work here!” shouted he, shaking his fist; “I cleaned these

*A mischievous fairy of the “Robin Goodfellow” sort, supposed to play tricks at night.

THE INVISIBLE PAINTER.

brushes myself last night, and look at them now ! ”

“ And he seems to have been at *me* too,” cried another, “ for here’s a child’s head on my canvas, which is none of *my* doing ! ”

“ Well,” yawned José Villavicemio, the laziest of the whole school, “ if it *is* the Zombi, I wish he’d just put in the face of my St. Catherine while he is about it, for I’m sure *I* can’t. Hollo ! ”

Well might he cry “ hollo ! ” There, on his canvas, instead of the blurred, unfinished head that he had left there the night before, was a face so beautiful, so admirably painted, and yet so light and delicate, that the whole six stared at it in silent astonishment.

At that moment the door opened, and in came Murillo.

“ Ha, Villavicemio ! ” cried he, looking from the picture to his lazy pupil, “ this is better than I expected of *you* ! ”

“ But it wasn’t I who did it, master — more’s the pity ! ”

“ Not you ? Who was it, then ? ”

THE INVISIBLE PAINTER.

"That's just what none of us can tell, Senor Don Esteban ; we found it here when we came."

"Hum," said Murillo. "Well, we can talk of that again ; let us get to work now."

But, from that day forth, it really seemed as if some mischievous fairy *had* taken Murillo's studio for his playground. Half-completed pictures were finished no one knew how — loose strips of canvas were covered with admirable portraits of the various pupils — and one morning there appeared on the wall a capital likeness of Murillo, at which the great master himself smiled approvingly. But all these paintings were so much better than anything which the students themselves could do, that they were completely puzzled.

However, Murillo was not the man to let such pranks be played upon him for nothing ; and one evening he said to his class :

"It's time to put a stop to these tricks, gentlemen. Whoever this invisible painter may be, he's a man like ourselves ; and our best way is to come an hour earlier to-morrow, and try if we can't catch him at work."

THE INVISIBLE PAINTER.

And so they did, sure enough; for when they came next morning, there, seated before one of the pictures, and so intent upon his work that he did not even hear the door open, was the "poor little monkey," Sebastian!"

It would be hard to say which was the more astounded — Sebastian to find himself caught, or Murillo and his pupils to see who their "fairy" really was.

"Who taught you to paint, boy?" asked Murillo at length.

"You, master," replied Sebastian timidly.

"Why, I never gave you a lesson in my life!"

"No, master; but I listened to what you told these gentlemen, and remembered it."

"And you have fairly beaten us all!" burst out Suarez, in his headlong way. "Bravo Sebastian!"

"Bravo Sebastian!" echoed all the rest.

"God bless thee, my son," said Murillo, laying his hand tenderly on the boy's head. "I have made something far better than a picture this time — I have made a painter! Henceforth thou shalt be

THE INVISIBLE PAINTER.

called no more Sebastian Gomez, but ' El Mucacho de Murillo ' " (Murillo's Boy).

And although Sebastian Gomez afterwards became a famous painter (as you may see by the pictures which he has left behind him) he was known as "Murillo's Boy" to the end of his life.

TWO PERSIAN SCHOOLBOYS.

WAKE, Otanes, wake, the Magi are singing the morning hymn to Mithras. Quick, or we shall be late at the exercises, and father promised, if we did well, we should go to the chase with him to-day."

"And perhaps shoot a lion. What a feather in our caps that would be! Is it pleasant?"

Smerdis pulled open the shutters that closed the windows, and the first rays of the sun sparkled on, the trees and fountains of a beautiful garden beyond whose lofty walls appeared the dwellings and towers of a mighty city. Already the low roar of its traffic reached them while hurrying on their clothes to join their companions in the spacious grounds where they were trained in wrestling, throwing blocks of wood at each other to acquire agility in dodging the missiles, the skilful use of the bow, and various other exercises

TWO PERSIAN SCHOOLBOYS.

for the development of bodily strength and grace.

A few minutes later the two brothers, Smerdis and Otanes, with scores of other lads, ranging in age from seven to fourteen years, were assembled in a vast playground, surrounded on all sides by a lofty wall.

The playground of a large boarding-school?

It almost might be called so, but the pupils of this boarding-school were educated free of expense to their parents, and it received only the sons of the highest nobles in the land. This playground was attached to the palace of Darius, King of Persia, who reigned twenty-four hundred years ago, and these chosen boys had been taken from their homes, as they reached the age of six years, to be reared "at his gate," as the language of the country expressed it.

Otanes and Smerdis were sons of one of the highest officers of the court, the "ear of the king," or, as he would now be called, the Minister of Police. Handsome little fellows of eleven and twelve, with blue eyes, fair complexions, and curling yellow locks, their long training in all sorts of physical exercises had made them stronger and hardier than most lads of their age in our time. Though reared in a palace, at

TWO PERSIAN SCHOOLBOYS.

one of the most splendid courts the world has ever seen, the boys were expected to endure the hardships of the poorest laborer's children. Instead of the gold and silver bedsteads used by the nobles, they were obliged to sleep on the floor; if the court was at Babylon, they were forced to make long marches under the burning sun of Asia, and if, to escape the intense heat, the king removed to his summer palaces at Ecbatana and Pasargadæ, situated in the mountainous regions of Persia, where it was often bitterly cold, the boys were ordered to bathe in the icy water of the rivers flowing from the heights. In place of the dainty dishes and sweetmeats for which Persian cooks were famous, they were allowed nothing but bread water, and a little meat; sometimes to accustom them to hardship they were deprived entirely of food for a day, or even longer.

On this morning the exercises seemed specially long to the two brothers, full of anticipations of pleasure; but finally the last block of wood was hurled, the last arrow shot, the last wrestling match ended, and the boys, bearing a sealed roll of papyrus, containing a leave of absence for one day, hurried off towards home.

TWO PERSIAN SCHOOLBOYS.

Their father's palace stood at no great distance from the royal residence, on the long, wide street, extending straight to the city gates, and like the houses of all the Persian nobles, was surrounded by a beautiful walled garden called a paradise, laid out with flower-beds of roses, poppies, oleanders, ornamental plants adorned with fountains, and shaded by lofty trees.

The hunting party was nearly ready to start, and the courtyard was thronged. Servants rushed to and fro bearing shields, swords, lances, bows and lassos, for a hunter was always equipped with bow and arrows, two lances, a sword and a shield. Others held in leash the dogs to be used in starting the game.

The enormous preserves in the neighborhood of Babylon were well-stocked with animals, including stags, wild boars, and a few lions. Several noblemen clad in the plain hunting costume always worn in the chase, were already mounted, among them the father of the two lads, who greeted them affectionately as they respectfully approached and kissed his hand.

"Make haste, boys, your horses are ready. Take only bows and shields—the swords and lances

TWO PERSIAN SCHOOLBOYS.

will be in your way ; you must not try to deal with larger game than you can manage with your arrows."

"May we not carry daggers in our belts too, father?" cried Otanes eagerly. "They can't be in our way, and if we should meet a lion" —

A laugh from the group of nobles interrupted him. "Your son seeks large game, Intaphernes!" exclaimed a handsome officer. "He must have better weapons than a bow and dagger, if" —

The rest of the sentence was drowned by the noise in the courtyard, but as the party rode towards the gate Intaphernes looked back: "Yes, take the daggers, it can do no harm. Keep with Candaules."

The old slave, a gray-haired, but muscular man, with several other attendants, joined the lads, and the long train passed out into the street and toward the city gates. Otanes hastily whispered his brother: "Keep close by me, Smerdis; if only we catch sight of a lion, we'll show what we can do with bows and arrows.

The sun was now several hours high, and the streets, lined with tall brick houses, were crowded with people — artisans, slaves, soldiers, nobles and citizens, the



THE BOYS HURRIED OFF TOWARD HOME.

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TWO PERSIAN SCHOOLBOYS.

latter clad in white linen shirts, gay woollen tunics and short cloaks. Two-wheeled wooden vehicles, drawn by horses decked with bells and tassels, litters containing veiled women borne by slaves, and now and then, the superb gilded carriage, hung with silk curtains, of some royal princess passed along. Here and there a heavily laden camel moved slowly by, and the next instant a soldier of the king's bodyguard dashed past in his superb uniform — a gold cuirass, purple surcoat, and high Persian cap, the gold scabbard of his sword and the gold apple on his lance-tip flashing in the sun.

High above the topmost roofs of even the lofty towers on the walls rose the great sanctuary of the Magi,* the immense Temple of Bel, visible in all quarters of the city, and seen for miles from every part of the flat plain on which Babylon stood. The huge staircase wound like a serpent round and round the outside of the building to the highest story, which contained the sanctuary itself and also the observatory whence the priests studied the stars.

Otanes and Smerdis, chatting eagerly together, rode

*The Magi were the Persian priests.

TWO PERSIAN SCHOOLBOYS.

on as fast as the crowd would permit, and soon reached one of the gates in the huge walls that defended the city. These walls, seventy-five feet high, and wide enough to allow two chariots to drive abreast, were strengthened by two hundred and fifty towers, except on one side, where deep marshes extended to their base. Beyond these marshes lay the hunting-grounds, and the party, turning to the left, rode for a time over a smooth highway, between broad tracts of land sown with wheat, barley and sesame. Slender palm-trees covered with clusters of golden dates were seen in every direction, and the sunbeams shimmered on the canals and ditches which conducted water from the Euphrates to all parts of the fields.

Otanes' horse suddenly shied violently as a rider, mounted on a fleet steed, and carrying a large pouch, dashed by like the wind.

"One of the Augari bearing letters to the next station!" exclaimed Smerdis. "See how he skims along. Hi! If I were not to be one of the king's bodyguard, I'd try for an Augar's place. How he goes! He's almost out of sight already."

"How far apart are the stations?" asked Otanes.

TWO PERSIAN SCHOOLBOYS.

"Eighteen miles. And when he gets there, he'll just toss the letter bag to the next man, who is sitting on a fresh horse waiting for it, and away *he'll* go like lightning. That's the way the news is carried to the very end of the empire of our lord the King."

"Must be fine fun," replied Otanes. "But see, there's the gate of the hunting-park. Now for the lion," he added gayly.

"May Ormuzd * save you from meeting one, my young master," said the old servant Candaules. "Luckily it's broad daylight, and they are more apt to come from their lairs after dark. Better begin with smaller game and leave the lion and wild boars to your father."

"Not if we catch sight of them," cried Otanes, settling his shield more firmly on his arm, and urging his horse to a quicker pace, for the head of the long train of attendants had already disappeared amid the dark cypress-trees of the hunting park. The immense enclosure stretching from the edge of the morasses that bordered the walls of Babylon far into the country, soon echoed with the shouts of the attendants

*The principal god of the Persians.

TWO PERSIAN SCHOOLBOYS.

beating the coverts for game, the baying of the dogs, the hiss of lances and whirl of arrows. Bright-hued birds, roused by the tumult, flew wildly hither and thither, now and then the superb plumage of a bird of paradise flashing like a jewel among the dense foliage of cypress and nut-trees.

Hour after hour sped swiftly away ; the party had dispersed in different directions, following the course of the game ; the sun was sinking low, and the slaves were bringing the slaughtered birds and beasts to the wagons used to convey them home. A magnificent stag was among the spoil, and a fierce wild boar, after a long struggle, had fallen under a thrust from Intaphernes's lance.

The shrill blast of the Median trumpet sounded thrice, to give the first of the three signals for the scattered hunters to meet at the appointed place, near the entrance of the park, and the two young brothers who, attended by Candaules and half a dozen slaves, had ridden far into the shady recesses of the woods, reluctantly turned their horses' heads. No thought of disobeying the summons entered their minds — Persian boys were taught that next to truth and cour-

TWO PERSIAN SCHOOLBOYS.

age, obedience was the highest virtue, and rarely was a command transgressed.

They had had a good day's sport; few arrows remained in their quivers, and the attendants carried bunches of gay plumaged birds and several small animals, among them a pretty little fawn. "Let's go nearer the marshes; there are not so many trees, and we can ride faster," said Otanes as the trumpet-call was repeated, and the little party turned in that direction, moving more swiftly as they passed out upon the strip of open ground between the thicket and the marshes. The sun was just setting. The last crimson rays, shimmering on the pools of water standing here and there in the morasses, cast reflections on the tall reeds and rushes bordering their margins.

Suddenly a pretty spotted fawn darted in front of the group, and crossing the open ground, vanished amid a thick clump of reeds. "What a nice pet the little creature would make for our sister Hadessah!" cried Otanes eagerly. "See! it has hidden among the reeds; we might take it alive. Go with Candaules and the slaves, Smerdis, and form a half-circle beyond the clump. When you're ready, whistle, and I'll ride

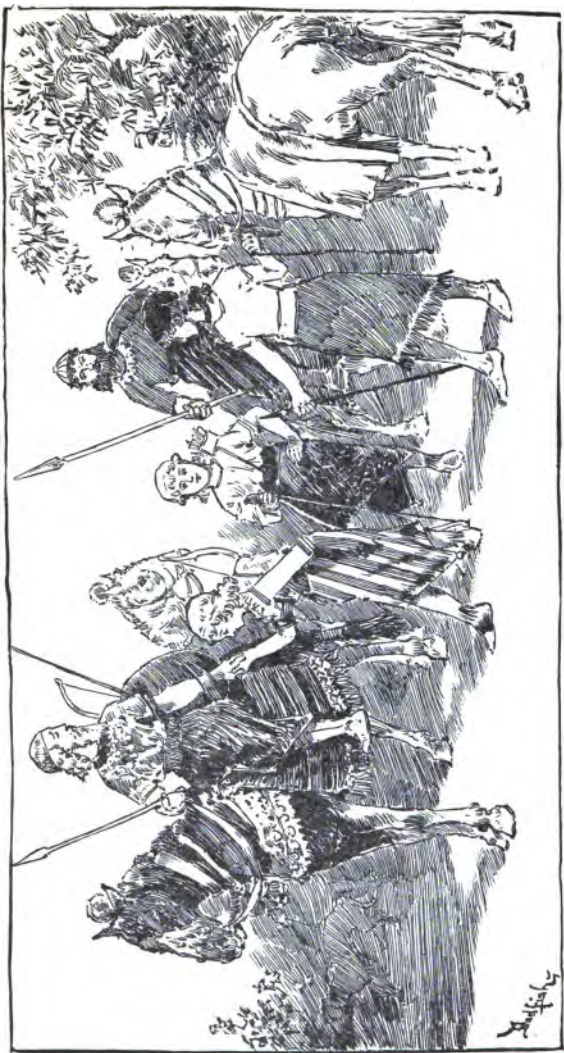
TWO PERSIAN SCHOOLBOYS.

straight down and drive it towards you ; you can easily catch it then. We are so near the entrance of the park now that we shall have plenty of time ; the third signal hasn't sounded yet."

Smerdis instantly agreed to the plan. The horses were fastened to some trees, and the men cautiously made a wide circuit, passed the bed of reeds, and concealed themselves behind the tall rushes beyond. A low whistle gave Otanes the signal to drive out the fawn.

Smerdis and the slaves saw the lad straighten himself in the saddle, and with a shout, dash at full speed towards the spot where the fawn had vanished. He had almost reached it when the stiff stalks shook violently, and a loud roar made them all spring to their feet. They saw the brave boy check his horse and fit an arrow to the string, but as he drew the bow, there was a stronger rustle among the reeds ; a tawny object flashed through the air, striking Otanes from his saddle, while the horse, free from its rider, dashed, snorting with terror, towards the park entrance.

"A lion! A lion!" shrieked the trembling slaves, but Smerdis, drawing his dagger, ran towards the



THE HUNTING PARTY WERE NEARLY READY TO START.

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TWO PERSIAN SCHOOLBOYS.

place where his brother had fallen, passing close by the body of the fawn which lay among the reeds with its head crushed by a blow from the lion's paw. Candaules followed close at the lad's heels.

Parting the thick growth of stalks, they saw, only a few paces off, Otanes, covered with blood, lying motionless on the ground, and beside him the dead body of a half-grown lion, the boy's arrow buried in one eye, while the blood still streamed from a lance-wound in the animal's side.

Smerdis, weeping, threw himself beside his brother, and at the same moment Intaphernes, with several nobles and attendants, attracted by the cries, dashed up to the spot. The father, springing from the saddle, bent, and laid his hand on the boy's heart.

"It is beating still, and strongly too!" he exclaimed. "Throw water in his face! perhaps" —

Without finishing the sentence, he carefully examined the motionless form. "Ormuzd be praised! He has no wound; the blood has flowed from the lion. See, Prexaspes, there is a lance-head sticking in its side. I believe it's the very beast you wounded early in the day."

TWO PERSIAN SCHOOLBOYS.

The officer whose laugh had so vexed Otanes, stooped over the dead lion and looked at the broken shaft.

“ Ay, it’s my weapon ; the beast probably made its way to the morass for water ; but, by Mithras ! * the lad’s arrow killed the brute ; the barb passed through the eyeball into the brain.”

“ Yes, my lord,” cried old Candaules eagerly, “ and doubtless it was only the weight of the animal, which, striking my young master as it made its spring, hurled him from the saddle and stunned him. See ! he is opening his eyes. Otanes, Otanes, you’ve killed the lion ! ”

The boy’s eyelids fluttered, then slowly rose, his eyes wandered over the group, and at last rested on the dead lion. The old slave’s words had evidently reached his ear, for with a faint smile he glanced archly at Prexaspes, and raising himself on one elbow, said :

“ You see, my lord — even with a bow and dagger ! ”

* The Persian god of the sun.

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